

TASMANIAN DEVILS

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The Tasmanian devil is a meat eating marsupial.

It is about the size of a small dog. It has thick black fur with some white markings. The devil's head is big for the size of the rest of its body. Long whiskers on its face and front legs help it to feel its way when hunting at night. It has a wide gaping mouth and lots of very sharp teeth that it shows if it feels in danger. The inside of its ears turn bright red when the animal gets upset. They are called devils because they look fierce and bad tempered and because of the spine chilling screams they make at night.

Tasmanian devils can only be found in Tasmania. They live anywhere in the bush. They will use any place they can find to hide and shelter during the day. They make dens or nests in burrows, hollow logs, or in small caves.

Devils give birth to lots of babies at one time. The mother has only four nipples in her pouch so the babies who get to the pouch first are the ones that live. They stay in the pouch attached to a nipple for about four months. Then they live in the den until they are ready to go out on their own in the bush.

Devils eat meat. They come out at night to search for food. Young devils will climb trees to catch and eat sleeping birds. Older devils are mainly scavengers. They use their good sense of smell to find dead animals. Dead sheep and cattle provide food in farming areas. They also eat animals that have been killed on the road. With their powerful jaws and strong teeth they will eat everything including bones and fur. They can eat a huge amount of food at one time.

As with most marsupials, they prefer to live by themselves and hunt alone. They do not form packs but they will often gather to feed off a large dead animal. This always results in lots of squabbling and biting.

In Tasmania there are no longer any natural predators for adult devils. Owls will hunt young devils. Large devils will eat small devils if they are hungry enough. In summer the numbers increase as the young devils come out of their nests but over half of them die in the first few months because of competition for food.



Tasmanian devils were almost wiped out by the early settlers because they thought that they killed their livestock. Today laws have been made to protect them. They do well living alongside man. They are helpful because they clean up farms and roads.